Children's Mental Health Week 2026

'This is my place'

Slide 1 – Children's Mental Health Week 2026

- Children's Mental Health Week is an important opportunity to reflect on how we can create environments where every child, staff member, and parent/carer feels a strong sense of belonging. Belonging is essential for good mental health and school engagement—it helps children feel valued, safe, and connected.
- This year's theme of 'This is My Place' focuses on helping children and young people feel a sense of belonging by strengthening the systems and relationships around them.
- This short guide will support all schools to reflect on the best practice of fostering a culture of belonging, to recognise each member of the community to ensure that a sense of belonging is intentional and successful.

Slide 2 – What is belonging

- Belonging is the experience of feeling accepted, respected and connected to the community you are in.
- Psychological safety is a key part of creating a culture of belonging across our school community. It refers to individuals across the community, staff, students and parent / carers feeling able to express themselves, ask questions, make mistakes and remain free from judgment.
- Opportunities to participate in school life encourages students to take an active role in building a supportive culture, increases sense of community and citizenship and encourages staff / pupil voice to feed into what is working well and what could be better.
- Creating time and space to truly recognise the school community through events, opportunities, celebrations and recognition of individuals encourages a sense of responsibility thus increasing the sense of being valued and integrated into all aspects of school life   .

Slide 3 – Whole School Approach

- Across Surrey we recognise the flower analogy as the best way to create a thriving culture in school by addressing the environment in which CYP grow and learn.
- As we focus on the theme of 'this is my place' and the importance of belonging this includes the groups and systems surrounding the children and young people that work together to enable thriving to take place.

- Within Bronfenn Brenner's ecological system theory, key systems around the CYP are shown.

- These multiple, interconnected systems can influence and shape the experiences the CYP have. When the systems work effectively together, they support need and help children to feel safe and valued. .
- The graphic on this slide is shown on the downloadable notes page with an explanation of each of the systems. You may wish to have this within the reflection slide towards the end to see how the systems around the CYP in your school influences engagement.

Slide 4 – Strong Pupil Voice

- At Eikon we have trained hundreds of pupils across Surrey to be Wellbeing Ambassadors. Students from year 3 talk about wellbeing in school, and it is priortised by senior leaders to make sure the community stay well.
- This pupil participation approach is aligned to the Lundy Model of participation, A Child's Right's based approach that effectively engages CYP in meaningful conversation about decisions that affect them
- Through taking this evidence informed approach to pupil participation it ensure inclusivity is considered across each of the 4 domains:
- Space - ensure students feel safe and able to access opportunities to freely share their views.
- Voice - ensure all young people have access to participation activities which may include adapting voice to other methods than spoken word.
- Audience - who hears the feedback and how do they listen to this
- Influence - how are their views acted upon and how much say do they have - has this been explicit and are CYP aware in advance.

Slide 5 – Safe and Welcoming Environment

- A safe and welcoming environment is one of the key aspects of psychological safety and fundamental to increasing the sense of belonging in school. When the environment is one of safety, engagement is higher, academic success achieved, absence decreased and a positive approach to engagement is noticed. This can be achieved through:
- Staff development – relational approaches encourages active listening and curiosity, especially around behaviour or responses. Through having an empathetic approach, relationships are supported as all individuals feel safe that their needs will be noticed and met.
- Embedding School Values – – Ensuring school values are part of policy and practice, are consistent across staff and are lived as part of the school culture, aligns practice, increases CYP's sense of safety and therefore belonging. Celebrating and recognising acts that reflect school values, reinforces a shared identity.
- Providing Safe Spaces to Talk - Designated calm areas where students can regulate emotions, connect with an emotionally available adult and seek support reinforces the safety school provides. Its is important to consider the age and experiences of CYP when we provide a space for regulation as some may benefit from co-regulation with a safe adult and connection during times of rupture. Times can sometimes be a challenge with this approach, but through giving the right sort of support CYP will learn key strategies and gain the emotional literacy skills that will benefit them long into the future.
- Significant events – An intentional and considered approach to celebration events aids belonging through engaging the community in meaningful activities. This avoid' s overwhelming schedules

allowing for events that celebrate the diversity of the community, aligns to school values, supports learning and ensures inclusivity and understanding of the school community

- I wish my teacher knew - Trauma-informed approach that creates a space for students to share thoughts, feelings, needs and successes they may not otherwise share. This is different from a worry box as students may not have a worry to share. This fosters belonging as encourages relationship building and knowledge of what is important to individuals in your class. It is important the box is checked regularly and there is a processes to follow up and concerns, and opportunities to connect over new or exciting news.

Slide 6 – Family and Community Engagement

Strengthening links between families and the community is key to strengthening a sense of belonging.

- Involve parents and carers – Supporting parent/ carer engagement through actively seeking views and providing timely feedback, celebrating the diversity of the parent/ carer body and strengthening this through inviting parents in to enrich learning topics.

- Clear and timely communication – Having clear communication throughout the year that is delivered in an accessible way. Many schools are moving to video / audio newsletters, created in collaboration with students. This supports student participation opportunities and adults that may find reading a challenge. Events and trips communicated in a timely manner, ideally at the beginning of the year to enable families to factor in costs or alternative arrangements. Having clear communication with parents to support expectations when responding to requests or queries and and providing up to date information accessible via the website.

- Build Partnerships – with local agencies and organisations can provide a wealth of opportunities for all members of the school community. Strengthening links with health and wellbeing services provides consistent messaging and support for families that may be experiencing difficulty and creates a sense of belonging around some of the most vulnerable groups. Creating community links and awareness of the surrounding area's encourages students to be aware of their responsibilities and engaging them in community life increases the wider sense of belonging to the areas around them.

Slide 7 – Foster Inclusion

When we are intentional with our approach to inclusion we celebrate the individual for the person they are. This can be a challenge in schools, especially when we refer back to the Ecological Systems Theory, as this demonstrates how the systems around the child can influence the support that is available and what is expected of them.

- Individual interest and talents – CYP feeling noticed and having an adult that is interested in them is key to increasing a student's sense of belonging. Remembering key events in students' lives, being aware of their interests and passion and taking an interest in them can make a significant difference in their engagement in school and school life.
- Equal access to opportunities – Providing opportunities for students that are fair and accessible is key to true engagement. Actively seeking the views of students that may not volunteer for events or opportunities provides valuable insights into their experience of school life. Through actively selecting

role model students this can cause greater disengagement and discourage students from feeling a sense of pride in their school.

- Adapted learning – Schools are excellent at knowing the learning needs of classes and adapting the learning to make it accessible. When we link this to belonging, experiencing success is key to engagement, growth and feeling safe to challenge mindsets. If students do not experience success or cannot access learning, which may be due to environmental reason, engagement in school can feel difficult to sustain.
- Buddy/ Peer systems – peer mentoring or buddy systems strengthens connections and increases relationships across the schools, gives students a role and responsibility and increases a feeling of belonging as they influence the experiences of others. Roles supporting this type of engagement can align to school values and provides opportunities for lots of different students to engage, including those that may not ordinarily volunteer.
- Displays – having clear display boards with destigmatizing language, where to go for help, key information around the culture of wellbeing in school encourages students to be aware of their wellbeing. PSHE topics can support difficult conversations that may come up with developing minds and provides a safe, nonjudgmental space to explore topics that young people may be curious about.

Slide 8 – 5 Ways to Wellbeing

- The 5 ways to wellbeing provides an accessible, evidence-informed approach to supporting wellbeing and encourages belonging across each of the 5 ways.
- CYP assembly slides are available within the resources for CH MH Week and can support actively building a culture of belonging.
- Eikon train hundreds of Wellbeing Ambassadors every year to understand how the 5 ways can support their own wellbeing and how this can support the wellbeing culture of school.
- If your school would like to get involved in this fully funded opportunity, information is provided on the support page at the end of this presentation.

Slide 9 – Reflection

- Taking a moment now to reflect on what we have heard and the opportunities to strengthen belonging in your school.
- Supporting psychological safety means ensuring each CYP feels seen, heard and valued. Its knowing they have adults on their side, they feel able to make mistakes and learn from them free from worry of being shamed or embarrassed and knowing who celebrates their successes.

Pause and reflect

Slide 10 – Feedback and Further Support

- If you would like further support review the wellbeing culture of your school Eikon have a fully funded programme called Smart Schools that can help with this.
- This program is aligned to the Public Health England Model of WSA and supports senior leaders, SMHL or those with a responsibility for wellbeing to constructively assess your whole school approach through the use of an audit on planned support.
- Wellbeing Ambassadors can be booked through our website

And there are a wealth of resources at mentally healthy schools to support your mental health and wellbeing approach.

There is also a short feedback form for your completion. We appreciate your feedback and enables us to create useful, effective resources in the future.

1. Microsystem (Immediate Environment)

- Includes family, peers, teachers, and the classroom.
- Positive relationships and inclusive classroom practices directly foster belonging.

2. Mesosystem (Connections Between Microsystems)

- Links between home and school, such as parent-teacher communication.
- Strong collaboration ensures consistency and reinforces a child's sense of security and belonging.

3. Exosystem (Indirect Influences)

- School policies, community resources, and staff support networks.
- When these are aligned to promote inclusion, students benefit even if they aren't directly involved.

4. Macrosystem (Wider Culture and Values)

- Cultural attitudes, school ethos, and societal norms.
- A school culture that values diversity and inclusion strengthens belonging for all students.

5. Chronosystem (Changes Over Time)

- Life transitions and historical context.
- Supporting students through changes (e.g., moving schools, family changes) maintains their sense of belonging.

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)